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Thailand: Thailand has been a remarkably stable and peacefully developing country in marked contrast to its more volatile neighbors. Authoritarian military regimes have ruled the country since the early 1930's with only brief interludes of democratic government -- the most recent effort collapsing during civil disorders in 1976. The Thai nonetheless have a high regard for democratic forms -- a sentiment reflected in the present regime's promise to hold elections in the near future.

General Kriangsak holds the posts of premier, supreme commander, and interior minister -- the classic power concentration of past Thai military dictators -- but is a pragmatic and moderate leader. Although the military remains restless, Kriangsak's position is bolstered by his skill at playing off his rivals and by the public support of the King, who wields considerable influence. The left is quiet -- its leaders underground or in exile.

The Thai economy, which is based primarily on agriculture, has shown steady rates of growth over the past few years, but currently is sluggish and plagued by a widening trade deficit. Recent discoveries of natural gas hold out prospects for a brighter economic future.

Since the end of the war in Vietnam, Thailand has pursued a policy of detente with its communist neighbors and has placed increasing emphasis on regional cooperation. Relations with Hanoi continue to be strained, however, by Vietnam's assistance to Thai communist guerrillas and Bangkok's reciprocal involvement with Lao resistance groups. Similar problems along the Cambodian border are more serious. Relations with China have substantially improved, but the Soviet Union is regarded with distaste and suspicion. Thailand is anxious to see ASEAN develop into a viable organization -- believing that a collective approach gives greater diplomatic leverage to its members.

Although Thailand has moved away from the almost symbiotic relationship with Washington of the past 25 years, Bangkok still regards close ties to the US as the lynchpin of Thai foreign policy and is anxious for continuing US involvement in Thailand's security and development. They hope this will be reflected in a liberal US policy regarding military sales, in continuing economic aid, and in gestures of a continuing US commitment to Thailand's defense. The problem of settling the Indochinese refugees in Thailand remains an active bilateral issue, as is the joint US-Thai effort against narcotics trafficking across the Thai-Burmese border.

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